

ENGINEERING HERITAGE AUSTRALIA

ENGINEERING HERITAGE GUIDELINES



PRACTICE NOTE No. 9

INTERPRETATION OF AN ENGINEERING HERITAGE ITEM

INTRODUCTION

Engineering Heritage Australia endorses the *Australia ICOMOS Practice Note on Interpretation* for the interpretation of places of heritage significance. It can be found at www.australia.icomos.org/publications/charters/. The *Australia ICOMOS Practice Note* draws on the principles set out in the international *ICOMOS Ename Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites*, while making specific reference to the Burra Charter with its emphasis on the significance of the place. The Practice note also provides guidance on some of the common issues which are likely to be confronted such as the interpretation of places with multiple and potentially conflicting values. The principles and processes for planning and implementing the interpretation of a place should be followed as set out by ICOMOS where applicable to engineering works.

In defining key interpretive themes and stories, ICOMOS acknowledges that interpretive themes may enable a place to be linked to other places, objects and collections, and to wider themes that extend across a locality, region or beyond. This aspect is particularly important for a range of significant engineering works, where the place of the interpretation is convenient rather than being specially significant, while the engineering concept or development is clearly embodied in the object or related group of objects.

Engineering works may be large and prominent items, typically represented by bridges or dams for which the place is fixed and significant to the work, along with the engineering solution adopted. Other significant engineering works may be individual small items such as the microchip, bionic ear or the heart pacemaker; they may be larger movable objects such as an engine, a pump, or a railway locomotive; or even a concept such as prestressing, or an idea such as how to use electricity, magnetism or electronics, through to a design development such as spun pipe manufacture. Consideration of the engineering items to be interpreted may be wide ranging and includes the ongoing development of the items. It is much broader in heritage terms than the concept of place and requires considerations to suit.

As an example of this wider view, it is important to determine the significance of the item in the timeline of the development of the idea behind it. The engineers who developed the ideas, who designed the works, expanded concepts, developed innovations and who constructed the works, may be important elements of the heritage of the item.

SUMMARY OF ENGINEERING HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

What is it ?

Interpretation, whether of a place or an object, is best explained by stating what it should do.

The interpretation should:-

- Demonstrate the significance of the item to the visitor.
- Inspire the visitor, provide personal experience value and persuade the visitor to care about the item.
- Encourage the continued appropriate conservation.

- In short, sell the item to the visitor. The best conserved item has no attraction if it cannot be sold to the visitor as a worthwhile experience. A story is needed to link the people, the evolution of the items design and construction, its use and its relationship to the community and to the visitor.

How to do it

- Describe the **significant aspects** of the item and provide them in a way to challenge and arouse the imagination of the visitor.
- Mention the **people** involved and tell their story.
- Tell the **stories** as instruction and entertainment.
- Select elements which will **maximize the impact** of the presentation whilst not detracting from the **cultural significance**.

PROCEDURE – JOINING IT ALL TOGETHER

1. Carry out the process described in this and the ICOMOS Practice Notes. Bear in mind that information includes not only the engineering attributes of the item but also:
 - Where it fits in the timeline development of the techniques it presents.
 - The persons involved – their involvement and personal details.
 - The story to be told with special regard to creating interest.
2. Select what is to be presented.
3. Present the information.

Internet Link

The presentation should provide a link to a website with direct contact providing the seeker with more information on the item. The information should enlarge upon and give extra detail. Works being interpreted by Engineering Heritage Australia should be linked to www.engineersaustralia.org.au/engineering-heritage-australia/

